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REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF SEVEN ON THE STUDY OF HISTORY IN SCHOOLS

THE committee appointed by the American Historical Association to consider the study of history in the secondary schools met at Cambridge in April. When once the work of the committee was fairly begun, the difficulties of its task became apparent. History is generally taught in all of the courses of the high school, and yet each course presents its distinct problems. The subject is taught under a great variety of conditions. There is no general agreement as to what field of history should be studied, and no agreement concerning the purposes or aims of historical study, and consequently nothing like agreement in the methods used in teaching. History, however, is now called upon to fill a larger place in the high school curriculum than has been accorded it in the past, if not a larger place a more dignified position, because schoolmen and school patrons are everywhere awaking to a fuller recognition of the fact that the object of the school is to prepare pupils for intelligent citizenship and to help them into an appreciative sympathy with the world in which they live. To place history beside other subjects, which have for many years been recognized as possessing high pedagogical value, is a difficult task, but it is one that must be approached with all seriousness and earnestness, not with the purpose of attacking or displacing other subjects, but with the intent of discovering the true position of history and of presenting its claims in a proper light. Before the meeting at Cambridge the committee had decided by correspondence to take up the whole matter of historical study, as far as it affected the secondary schools. It was plain that only a comprehensive plan was practicable, inasmuch as even the mechanics of the programme seemed dependent upon a variety of conclusions, regarding which there was need of

previous agreement ; and it was thought that a piece of thorough and systematic work would produce a good effect upon the teaching of history throughout the country.

Recognizing fully the difficulty of its task the committee did not wish to hurry over its problems or to assume the power and the knowledge requisite for their immediate solution. On the contrary, if the work were to be well done, the thoughtful coöperation of the teachers of the country would be needed, and the committee at once decided to enlist their sympathy and assistance. Such coöperation might well be assured, if once the teachers felt that there was no desire to dictate or lay down the law, but a sincere wish to study the situation fairly, to combine, arrange and systematize the results of careful investigation, and to make recommendations that would be helpful and stimulating to the schools and be, as far as possible, matured judgments formed after careful and conscientious work. To secure the desired information and to win the assistance and coöperation of the schools, several plans were decided upon. One was to send circulars asking for information from teachers and superintendents. These circulars are to be sent not to all the schools in the United States, but to selected schools, which may be considered representative or typical. To study only the best schools would be as misleading as to study only the worst. Care, therefore, has been taken to find out what may be considered the typical schools in each state, schools that are thought to be working under normal and wholesome conditions and seem to furnish fair examples of the instruction given and the difficulties encountered in that state. Moreover it was thought desirable to use existing educational associations as a means of acquiring information, and the members of the committee decided to attend, when possible, the meetings of these various associations, and seek to gain information by personal interviews with teachers at the larger educational gatherings, and by special conferences and discussions. Information thus gathered seemed likely to be of more value than any amount of material acquired by formal correspondence. To do this work properly is, of course, the

task of years and not of weeks ; and yet the committee hopes to make a report before the beginning of the next calendar year that will be of value to the schools and helpful to the committee of the National Educational Association which has entered upon the enormous undertaking of organizing high-school programmes in the light of the most recent expert recommendations.

The historical committee has also undertaken to get together actual working programmes and to publish them as exhibits, being assured that an ounce of realism is worth many pounds of speculation. Moreover, inasmuch as it is generally admitted that the European schools have, in many instances at least, developed the study of history much more fully than we have in America, and their experiences and present methods are likely to be of service to us, a careful examination is to be made of the systems of foreign schools, and the result of the examinations are to be published. One member of the committee will spend the summer in Germany investigating the study of history in the *Gymnasia* of that country. Like personal investigations will be made in England and France and to some extent in Switzerland. No one supposes, however, that we can force the American schools into an imported strait-jacket. Nothing would be more unwise than such an effort, or farther from the purpose of the committee. European schools work under conditions quite different from our own and our task is to develop a system that is suited to our own needs. Nevertheless a knowledge of what is done in Europe is likely to be helpful to us, and to suggest plans for our improvement. Such information will be of service to teachers, who may have difficulty in getting other accurate information of what is done in European schools.

The session of the committee at Cambridge lasted two days ; but its findings were in the end only preliminary. A number of tentative conclusions were reached, but scarcely any of them can be looked upon as really final. Methods of teaching, the order in which the different historical fields should be entered, the best fields of study for different courses in the high schools, the amount that might be justly recommended, the aims and pur-

poses of historical study, the material that should be used in imparting instruction or in stimulating pupils to independent reading, are some of the subjects which were discussed with earnestness. But the committee found itself unwilling to give final answer to any of these questions, preferring to discuss them again in the light of more complete information and after longer deliberation.

In conclusion it may be said, that the committee wishes the the school-teachers of the country to feel that it has entered upon this task with a full appreciation of its difficulties and with sincere desire, not to exalt and magnify its office or to crowd history upon the schools regardless of the demands of other subjects, but to offer helpful suggestions and to do something in the way of formulating and systematizing the thought of earnest teachers who are interested in the puzzling and important problems with which the committee is dealing.

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